



HARTFORD DISPENSARY

Established 1871

February 18, 2009

To: Appropriations Committee

From: Paul McLaughlin, Executive Director
Hartford Dispensary

**Re: DSS Budget Regarding Elimination of Dental Service for Non-emergency Care
Dental Services Testimony**

I am Paul McLaughlin, Executive Director of the Hartford Dispensary. The Hartford Dispensary is a private, non-profit agency incorporated in 1871, which operates medical facilities in Hartford (2), New London, Norwich, Willimantic, New Britain, Bristol and Manchester. Each facility is licensed for both Adult Psychiatric Care and Substance Abuse Treatment and fully accredited. The agency specializes in the delivery of comprehensive, outpatient methadone treatment services to chronic opiate dependent patients. The agency treats some 4,000 patients per day, over 6,500 patients per year.

As dental health is critical to a person's overall physical health, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you our concerns regarding the proposed elimination of Department of Social Services funds for dental coverage for adults enrolled in Title 19.

Over the years, the agency has conducted a number of surveys to determine the services needed by patients. The services that have consistently been identified as the most needed have been: housing, employment and dental services. Agency case managers work with patients in securing both employment and locating affordable housing. In order to address the dental needs, in 2001 the agency initiated contact with the UCONN Dental School which resulted in a collaborative effort to develop dental services on-site at one of the Hartford area clinics. The agency subsequently opened a dental clinic in the last quarter of 2007. In 2008, 367 patients received dental care. These services continue to be highly utilized. The

majority of patients receiving dental services are poor and minority patients living in the greater Hartford area. The program has been an unqualified success as it has significantly enhanced the self-esteem and self confidence of many patients who have literally been given back “a smile on their face.”

The majority of our patients are enrolled in Title 19 and SAGA, thus the majority of dental service funding comes from these sources. Consequently, elimination of Title 19 and SAGA coverage for adult dental services could jeopardize this program. As a result, the elimination of these entitlements could result in a loss of dental services for the patients we serve.

The UCONN Dental School is excited and extremely supportive of this program as 25% of their 3rd year dental students are rotated through the agency dental program. The faculty and students are extremely positive about the program as students gain valuable hands on clinical experience. They also gain exposure to providing services to an indigent population which makes them comfortable in working with this population.

The agency believes providing dental services to the poor and needy who have limited access to dental care is a humane act that should be supported. Oral health contributes directly to a person’s positive self image and personal confidence – both of which are critical components of one’s ability to achieve and maintain sobriety and sustain one’s journey on the road to recovery.

Being cognizant of the financial realities being addressed by the state, we recommend to the committee a reduction of dental services, as opposed to the elimination of services. We specifically recommend maintaining funding for examinations and cleanings, extractions and dentures.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my support for dental services.